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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 12 October 2005, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Butagira (Uganda)
later: Mr. Anshor (Vice-Chairman) (Indonesia)
later: Mr. Butagira (Uganda)

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05-54530 (E)



The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 62: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family
(*continued*) (A/C.3/60/L.3 and L.4)

Draft decision A/C.3/60/L.3: Implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons: realizing the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities

1. **Ms. Banzon Abalos** (Philippines) introduced the draft resolution on behalf of the original sponsors and also Australia, Azerbaijan, Costa Rica, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Japan, Mongolia, Myanmar and Timor-Leste.

2. She read out a number of revisions to the text, including a new preambular paragraph, to be inserted after the fourth preambular paragraph, which read: "Reaffirming the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits and their respective follow-up reviews,".

3. **Ms. Enkhsetseg** (Mongolia) introduced the draft resolution on behalf of the original sponsors and also Brazil, China, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Mexico, Myanmar, Switzerland and Timor-Leste.

4. She read out a number of minor revisions to the text.

Agenda item 64: Advancement of women (*continued*)
(A/60/38, A/60/62-E/2005/10, A/60/79, A/60/111, A/60/137 and Corr.1, A/60/165, A/60/206, A/60/211, A/60/274, A/60/281, A/60/371 and A/60/372)

Agenda item 65: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (*continued*)
(A/60/111, A/60/170, A/60/211 and A/60/371)

5. **Mr. Widhya** (Cambodia) said that poverty eradication was closely intertwined with the advancement of women. In Cambodia, women were more vulnerable to poverty because they suffered from various forms of inequality, including with respect to distribution of income, access to credit and property

ownership, as well as from gender biases in the labour market and society at large. Any poverty reduction strategies and policies should therefore emphasize the importance of achieving gender equality and the advancement of women.

6. Cambodia had been endeavouring for the past 10 years to overcome many obstacles to eradicating poverty, in particular the dreadful gender imbalance caused by the genocidal regime of Pol Pot. Under his rule, 75 per cent of households had been run by widows and women, because most men had been killed mercilessly by Pol Pot's henchmen and zealous child soldiers. The importance of women in ensuring economic growth must therefore not be overlooked. His Government had taken a proactive approach by incorporating gender issues into its national plan for strategic development, which encompassed the activities, goals and indicators of every Government ministry. Furthermore, the Ministry of Women's and Veterans' Affairs had led efforts to reduce gender-based disparities and improve gender equity in health, education, agriculture and legal protection.

7. Women had recently taken a more active role in the political life of the country. In the 2003 general election in Cambodia, 12 per cent of the parliamentary seats and 13 per cent of the posts for Senator had gone to women candidates, an increase of some 18 per cent over the previous term. Those results showed that the involvement of women in the decision-making process at both local and national levels had improved significantly.

8. His Government was grappling with the threat of HIV/AIDS, which was affecting women and children in particular. There were currently some 50,000 women living with HIV in Cambodia. He reiterated his Government's call to the international community to remain firm in its commitment to assist developing countries in the fight against that scourge, including especially the commitments made in the Brussels Programme of Action for the least developed countries.

9. Poverty eradication must be complemented by equal access to education. Education indicators for the period 2003-2004 continued to show a decreasing share of female students at the higher levels of education. Schools must be made more accessible to all, regardless of social and economic background. His Government therefore supported the recommendations of the Millennium Project report known as "quick

wins", including the elimination of school fees and user fees for basic health services as well as the provision of free school meals for all children using locally produced foods. As the problem was not unique to Cambodia, his delegation called for a greater effort by the international community, under the guidance of the United Nations, to implement more long-term initiatives aimed at creating environments conducive to the full education of girls and to make consistent and concerted efforts to improve the status and welfare of women.

10. **Mr. Saeed** (Sudan) said that his country placed particular emphasis on the advancement and empowerment of women with a view to enabling them to enjoy their rights and participate in public life. It was important, however, in addressing the advancement of women, to take into account social diversity and differing cultures and traditions. Despite some progress since the Beijing World Conference on Women, there was a need for still greater efforts to address the negative impact of globalization on the developing countries which particularly affected women. In that connection, international efforts were required to incorporate the States affected by globalization in the world economy.

11. The report of the Secretary-General had reviewed the action taken by the General Assembly and its Main Committees at the previous session towards the objective of ensuring equality through the strategy of mainstreaming a gender perspective. His delegation welcomed what had been achieved in that connection but considered that the report should have focused on such issues as the eradication of poverty, violence against women, the exploitation of women for the purposes of prostitution and the trafficking in women and girls without regard for their dignity or rights. His delegation called on the Division for the Advancement of Women to continue its efforts and to reflect those issues in its report at the next session of the General Assembly. Efforts should be made to address the fundamental causes of violence against women and the means of combating it, including legislation at the national and international levels.

12. The plight of Palestinian women under the Israeli occupation required action by the United Nations to alleviate their suffering and to ensure that Palestinian women were able to enjoy the right to life and dignity.

13. At the national level, his country had for decades been among the leading States in promoting the enjoyment by women of their rights and their effective participation in public life. It fully supported the aims and objectives of the Beijing Conference and of the Beijing Platform for Action. High-level committees had been established in the Sudan to monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the various international conferences and the parallel national meetings. Among them had been the meeting of Sudanese women which had taken place on the fringe of the Oslo Donors' Conference in April 2005 and had made recommendations to that conference on establishing peace, confidence-building, and post-conflict reconstruction.

14. In conclusion, his delegation expressed the hope that the study to be made available at the next session of the General Assembly on the subject of violence against women would form a basis for worldwide efforts to eradicate such violence.

15. **Mr. Talbot** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that the empowerment of women and gender equality were key priorities for the Governments he represented, which considered women's rights to be human rights, entitling them to participate on an equal footing with men in social, political, economic and cultural life. It was accordingly essential for an environment to be created at the national and the international level that would be conducive to the progressive enhancement of the status of women in every field.

16. CARICOM States welcomed the increased prominence of gender equality on the international agenda and the progress achieved in the empowerment of women, which was nevertheless still challenged by worrisome trends in several areas. Referring to recent reports, he noted for example that HIV/AIDS infection rates were increasing more rapidly among females and that, despite advances in the education of women and girls, women were still more likely to be unemployed, had less access than men to managerial and senior positions and suffered disproportionately from gender-based violence. It was therefore urgent to strengthen gender mainstreaming at all levels and to address gender as a crosscutting element in all social and macroeconomic planning.

17. Other related current concerns of CARICOM included the gender dimension of natural disasters,

gender-based violence, trafficking in persons, and the feminization of poverty. He emphasized that efforts to combat poverty, which was sometimes masked by the relatively high development indicators of the region, particularly among women, were hampered by the international situation. He referred in that connection to the negative impacts on women of the liberalization of the banana industry and the proposed adjustment of the EU sugar regime, stressing that unless women were economically empowered, there could be no gender equality. He urged the international community to address issues relating to women's education and health in tandem with those of greater market access for commodities from developing countries, debt relief, development assistance and differential treatment for small island developing States.

18. CARICOM States were taking steps to strengthen the capacity of police officers and frontline workers to assist victims of domestic violence. They urged States to contribute to the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women and looked forward to completion of the in-depth study by the United Nations on the subject.

19. CARICOM reaffirmed the centrality of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and considered that interaction between the Committee set up under that instrument and Member States was essential to advancing the cause of women's rights. He expressed support in that connection for the extension of the annual meeting time of that Committee.

20. In conclusion, he expressed appreciation for the constant support for the empowerment of women extended to CARICOM States by bilateral and multilateral agencies, welcoming in that regard the revitalization of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

21. **Mrs. Thomas** (Cuba) said that, despite the progress achieved towards the Millennium Goals of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, problems such as the feminization of poverty, violence in all its forms, including economic violence, trafficking in persons and forced prostitution still prevailed worldwide. She advocated a broad approach to those problems, particularly that of violence against women, which had to be eliminated and should be condemned by the international

community. At a time when women were suffering the consequences of the globalization of neo-liberal policies, it was essential to redouble international efforts for the implementation of public strategies to benefit the people at large, especially women.

22. The objectives and goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the results of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly needed to be followed up as a matter of priority in order to contribute to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals. It was likewise imperative to continue emphasizing the promotion of gender equality and the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women, as well as the increased participation of women in decision-making.

23. In any strategy for the promotion of women it was crucial to guarantee women's sexual and reproductive rights, through universal access to the necessary services. Cuba accordingly supported the work of the United Nations system in that important area and continued to cooperate with the international community to promote the advancement of women and eradicate discrimination against them. Political will had to be reflected in public discourse, while the reiteration of unattained goals had to give way to the formulation of concrete measures for their achievement, so that they could at last become realities.

24. Cuba, for its part, had made indisputable advances in all the areas under discussion, having high proportions of women in gainful employment in general, and particularly in senior positions, including 35 per cent of the seats in parliament. Those advances had been achieved despite the blockade imposed by the United States, which was in itself the greatest form of violence against Cuban women. Her country would continue to apply political will to address all the outstanding obstacles and challenges.

25. **Mr. Ritter** (Liechtenstein), noting the Committee's particular attention at its previous session to specific forms of violence against women, said that the emphasis was probably not simply a sign of growing awareness that such violence was a major impediment to the advancement of women but also a reflection of the lack of a holistic understanding of the problem. He therefore welcomed the Secretary-General's in-depth study on the subject, as it could contribute significantly to enhancing political

commitment and creating momentum for action in that area. Because of regional variations in the phenomenon, the study would benefit from work done at the regional level. He referred in that connection to a study being undertaken on violence against children, within the framework of the Council of Europe, suggesting that the parallel preparation of the two studies might offer an opportunity to identify causes and structural factors common to both forms of violence.

26. He expressed support for the identification of best practices and spoke of his country's experience in designing and implementing measures to combat violence against women, entailing both protection and prevention. The measures also included the provision of assistance to victims, an issue that should not be neglected, particularly when in the context of armed conflict, which tended to exacerbate violence against women. Efforts to restore peace and rebuild society had to place particular emphasis on the reintegration of victims of violence into society, while only the genuine empowerment of women could ensure not only that women were sufficiently protected against violence but also that they served as their own best protectors.

27. **Ms. Henouda** (Algeria), noting with satisfaction the measures taken by Governments to honour the commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women, said that those measures had helped to improve equality of opportunity for women in education, health and employment and integrated them better into society and into economic and political life. Nevertheless, many women still suffered in various regions from poverty, violence and marginalization and were increasingly threatened by HIV/AIDS. Violence against women was particularly worrying since, besides being a violation of their human rights, it endangered their health, particularly in their capacity as mothers. She joined previous speakers in welcoming the Secretary-General's forthcoming report on the subject, expressing the hope that it would help to identify ways of eradicating the phenomenon.

28. In Algerian society, women participated on an equal footing with men in economic, social and political life, as guaranteed by the Constitution. In order to consolidate further the rights of women in her country, Algeria had actively sought to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It had focused particularly on education, achieving parity between boys and girls at all levels, and having even a

larger proportion of males than females at the higher level. In addition, girls prevented by circumstances from enjoying the benefits of schooling, received free training at training centres or through distance education. Gender equality had also been achieved in the fields of health, social security and retirement, and likewise in employment where women were well represented not only in the professions but also in the army, the police force, diplomacy and the higher echelons of the State.

29. Much still remained to be done. Algeria had accordingly ratified all the international human rights instruments, particularly those in support of women, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, on which it had submitted its second report in January 2005. Some of the concerns expressed on that occasion had, moreover, already been taken into account through amendments to Algeria's family and nationality codes, while others were being studied attentively in the light of the recommendations made by the experts.

30. **Ms. Shahar** (Israel) said that Israel believed, as a matter of democratic principle, that by supporting women it supported the whole of society, because women's contributions to society were essential for its own advancement. It had accordingly always given priority to gender equality, the ultimate aim being a gender-blind society where citizens could rise as high as their ambitions and skills allowed, irrespective of other factors.

31. Israeli women were active in the political arena at all levels. In Israel's parliament, where they had created a cross-party pro-women's rights synergy exceeding their actual number, considerable attention had been given to women's issues in the previous decade, resulting in the passage of numerous laws and further improving gender equality. One recent law made it mandatory for the Israeli Government to include women in any group assigned to peacebuilding negotiations and conflict resolution. Moreover, at the seminars it had sponsored to open dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian women, 50 per cent of the participants were Palestinian women.

32. Israel's commitment to the advancement of women extended beyond borders throughout the region and the world, often in cooperation with the United Nations and other international bodies. It had provided

training courses over the previous decade for hundreds of women throughout the world, emphasizing the role of women in development and entrepreneurship. It was also particularly active at the international level, recently hosting for instance an international conference for women leaders whose recommendations on gender issues within the Millennium Goals it proposed to bring to the attention of the High-level Dialogue of the General Assembly in June 2006. She stressed, in conclusion, that for her country the advancement of women was an ongoing effort of which it was proud and to which it remained committed, as it was to safeguarding the equality of all citizens.

33. **Ms. Aljenaibi** (United Arab Emirates) said that the United Arab Emirates attached great importance to the implementation of the recommendations and outcomes of all conferences on the advancement of women, particularly the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Realizing that the implementation of such recommendations was vital to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the Government had acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2004 and had become a party to nine international treaties on work and equal wages for women.

34. Her delegation wished to emphasize that relations between men and women in the United Arab Emirates were governed by Islamic precepts and inherited customs, which prohibited all forms of violence against women. The Government had adopted many laws protecting women against exploitation and imposing severe punishments for all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence. The Constitution recognized equality between the sexes in all rights and responsibilities, including the right to work, social security, education, health and social services. Furthermore, the Government had recently taken legal measures to allow children of widows and women divorced from non-nationals to be naturalized through their mother.

35. The United Arab Emirates had established six national mechanisms for the advancement of women and the implementation of the recommendations of the relevant international conferences and summits. Achievements included: high female enrolment in schools; substantially improved maternity care; higher

participation of women in the workforce; and increased investment opportunities.

36. The United Arab Emirates had also contributed to the advancement of women in a number of developing countries affected by natural disasters and armed conflicts by providing financial assistance and by assisting in the implementation of social development programmes.

37. Finally, with respect to the occupied Palestinian territories and Palestinian women in particular, the United Arab Emirates called upon the international community to compel Israel to respect the relevant international humanitarian laws, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention on the treatment of civilians.

38. **Ms. Bahemuka** (Kenya) said that her Government welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", and supported the recommendations contained in part III.

39. The Government attached due importance to gender equality and had adopted a national policy on gender and development in 2000 to facilitate gender mainstreaming in all its policies, programmes and laws. The Government had begun to implement affirmative action policies by lowering university admission requirements for female students and incorporating a provision in the draft Constitution that one third of parliamentary seats and the proposed district government should be held by women. Given that development depended on agriculture and small enterprises, the Government had created an enabling environment for access to credit and had put in place a legal framework to ensure equality in inheritance, land ownership and property rights. With respect to maternal health care and HIV/AIDS, the Government had launched a national reproductive health strategy for 1997-2010 and had adopted an HIV/AIDS strategic plan to reduce the rate of incidence among women and girls. Recognizing that education was a key factor in the empowerment of women, Kenya had enacted legislation to promote equal access to education and had introduced free primary education in 2003.

40. As part of its legal reform, the Government had written a draft Constitution aimed at protecting women against harmful traditional and cultural practices,

taking into account the principles of affirmative action, equal access to resources and equal citizenship rights. To enhance equal access to the law, especially for poor and vulnerable women, the Government had established family courts that were more sensitive to women and children and had decentralized the public trustee services to make them more accountable, particularly in the case of widowed women. Future projects included raising female enrolment in tertiary institutions and universities and increasing the number of women in decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors.

41. *Mr. Anshor (Indonesia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

42. **Ms. Sipraseuth** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that, although progress had been made in many areas, millions of women continued to live in poverty. To remedy the situation, the international community needed to focus on real and sustainable rural development and poverty eradication, especially in developing countries. The Lao Government itself was carrying out comprehensive economic and political reforms to address poverty, particularly in the rural areas.

43. With respect to gender equality, a women's union had been formed to promote greater access to education, health-care services, vocational training and employment. Women made a significant contribution to national development and occupied leadership positions at all levels. The Government had spared no effort to disseminate the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and had set up a national commission for the advancement of women to assist in formulating national policy and strategies. The commission was currently in the process of drafting a national strategy for the advancement of women for the period 2005-2010, which aimed to enhance women's participation in poverty eradication; promote education for women; improve health-care services; promote women to decision-making positions; and strengthen organizations that protected and promoted women.

44. **Ms. Feller** (Mexico) said that her delegation welcomed the renewed commitments in the 2005 World Summit Outcome. Mexico firmly believed that, within the general context of the United Nations reform, Member States played a decisive role in defining the competencies, responsibilities and

mandates of the different United Nations bodies involved in gender issues. Given the challenging agenda, coordination and cooperation among those bodies had become indispensable. As a member of the Consultative Committee of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and of the Executive Board of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), Mexico had supported the development of specific projects favouring gender equality and the advancement of women. Mexico remained committed to the goals of the international instruments regarding women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, its Optional Protocol and the Convention of Belém do Pará, which was the only binding legal instrument on gender-based violence.

45. The Mexican Government would continue to investigate the murders in Ciudad Juárez within the framework of the Optional Protocol. The Government had supported the visit of two experts from the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to Ciudad Juárez and had reported on the progress achieved in implementing the recommendations contained in the experts' report.

46. Millions of women continued to live in poverty, suffering the consequences of inadequate health care, lack of access to education and job opportunities, lower wages, discriminatory laws and physical or sexual violence. Because many were forced to migrate, they became potential victims of trafficking and labour exploitation. The international community had a moral obligation to help such women.

47. **Ms. Banzon** (Philippines) said that the Philippines had made considerable progress in promoting women's rights over the past decade. The Government had passed domestic laws against sexual harassment, rape, trafficking and domestic violence and had become a party to several international Conventions including the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Air and Sea; the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

48. Filipino women had begun to occupy a greater number of decision-making positions in the public and private sectors, including foreign affairs, budget and management, labour and the civil service. Mechanisms and instruments to improve gender mainstreaming in the Government had also been developed, including a policy whereby at least five per cent of budget allocations must be spent on gender and development programmes in all government agencies. Given that gender equality and women's empowerment could not be fully achieved until poverty was eradicated, the Government was making an effort to provide microfinance services to women, including entrepreneurial assistance and social safety nets.

49. At the international level, UNIFEM and INSTRAW should be accorded the appropriate status and supported with adequate resources. Also, given the immense impact of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Member States were urged to provide the CEDAW Committee with the necessary support.

50. **Mr. Aksen** (Turkey) said that his country had made significant progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as the Beijing Plus Five commitments. The Government had recently established a legal framework for gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women and had adopted laws on basic education and the protection of the family, as well as new civil and penal codes.

51. Turkey attached great importance to combating violence against women and was pursuing a comprehensive legal and social strategy to curtail such violence. A research commission on honour killings had been set up and the relevant laws had been tightened. Turkey was looking forward to the timely submission of the report of the Secretary-General regarding the study on violence against women.

52. Turkey had been a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women since 1985 and had ratified the Optional Protocol in 2002. In 2005, the Government had submitted its combined fourth and fifth periodic reports to the Committee established under that Convention. Having noted the Committee's concluding comments, Turkey would continue its determined efforts to establish gender equality and prevent discrimination against women.

53. **Mr. Shaari bin Hassan** (Malaysia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that in June 2004 the ASEAN foreign ministers had signed the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the ASEAN Region. At the tenth ASEAN Summit, in November 2004, ASEAN leaders had considered further areas of action and cooperation on the advancement of women, including the development and implementation of a workplan to increase women's participation in politics and action to promote increased participation of women and young persons in the productive workforce and to reduce social risks faced by children, women, the elderly and persons with disabilities. They had also adopted the ASEAN Declaration against Trafficking in Persons, particularly Women and Children, which outlined measures that ASEAN members would undertake to address the issue. The third meeting of the ASEAN Committee on Women had focused on cooperation towards elimination of trafficking in persons and violence against women. At the subregional level, following the signing of the memorandum of understanding of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT) in 2005, the six Greater Mekong subregion countries had agreed on a subregional plan of action against human trafficking.

54. The ASEAN Committee on Women was entrusted with the coordination and monitoring of cooperation in women's issues and concerns. Member States used the opportunity of Committee meetings to exchange views on their national experiences in addressing the critical areas of concern under the Beijing Platform for Action. The Committee also coordinated the implementation of the ASEAN Regional Programme on Women and Skills Training, formulated in 2000, and is in the process of preparing a workplan on women's advancement and gender equality. The fourth meeting of the Committee, which would be held in the Philippines in November 2005, would focus on economic and social empowerment of ASEAN women. To provide further guidance and direction to its work, the Committee proposed to establish an ASEAN ministerial meeting on women.

55. **Ms. Mahmood** (Bahrain) said that the advancement and empowerment of women were among the main objectives of the Millennium Development Goals and that Bahrain, like many other countries, had made efforts to ensure that women enjoyed the same

rights as men and worked as equal partners towards the goals of the national development strategy.

56. Although women in Bahrain had played a major role in many fields, such as teaching and nursing, during the twentieth century, it was only with the reform project, under the leadership of the King of Bahrain, beginning in 1999, that women had attained equal economic, social, cultural and other rights. On the occasion of International Women's Day in 2005, the King had launched the national strategy for the advancement of women, which guaranteed women's enjoyment of full political rights under the Constitution. The Supreme Council for Women worked to empower women and enable them to play their part, without discrimination, in public life and in national development. A prize was awarded every two years to ministries and to public and private bodies for outstanding contributions to the empowerment of Bahraini working women, the purpose being to encourage the training of women, their involvement in national development plans and their appointment to senior decision-making posts, as well as to encourage such bodies to respect the policy of non-discrimination against women.

57. The statistics indicated how much had been achieved in terms of the advancement of women in education, health, the economy and in social and political life. The illiteracy rate among women had fallen from 76.1 per cent in 1971 to 17 per cent in 2001 and there also had been reductions in the rate of infant mortality and a rise in the percentage of women in employment. Women currently exercised their political rights far more than previously: between 2001 and 2002 the proportion of women members of the Consultative Council had risen from 10 to 15 per cent. Women also participated far more than before as electors and constituted 10.1 per cent of all candidates for election to municipal councils and 4.3 per cent of candidates for election to the National Assembly.

58. Bahrain had thus made great strides towards implementing the Millennium Development Goals in respect of the empowerment of women and aspired to make further progress. The Government had chosen a Bahraini woman as its candidate for the Presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. Her election would be an important step towards giving women a leading role in the construction of a modern society, in keeping with the Millennium Declaration.

59. *Mr. Butagira (Uganda), Chairman, resumed the Chair.*

60. **Ms. Pi** (Uruguay) speaking on behalf of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) and its associate member countries Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela, reiterated the firm commitment of MERCOSUR to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and the Millennium Development Goals. As recognized in the Copenhagen Declaration, social justice and equitable social development were essential for a process of sustainable development. Furthermore, equity and equality between women and men and the full participation of women in all fields, including decision-making, must be a fundamental element of economic and social development.

61. As MERCOSUR countries attached great importance to mainstreaming gender perspectives in public policies, a specialized body had been established within MERCOSUR where female ministers and relevant authorities could meet to debate issues concerning the promotion and protection of women's rights.

62. The Governments of MERCOSUR countries were also promoting public policies that guaranteed the full exercise of human rights to men and women. Priority areas for their public policies included, inter alia: combating domestic violence and its consequences; designing and implementing gender-based employment policies; and guaranteeing the full exercise of sexual and reproductive rights.

63. The MERCOSUR countries noted with deep satisfaction that the 2005 World Summit Outcome spoke of the need to put an end to impunity in order to protect women and girls from all forms of discrimination and violence.

64. In view of the feminization of HIV/AIDS, universal access to reproductive health was an essential step towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It was particularly important to help women and girls to protect themselves from the risk of infection through preventive education that promoted gender equality. Sexual and reproductive health programmes must be supported within the context of human rights, particularly those reproductive rights acknowledged

and reaffirmed by the international community, and individuals, particularly girls and women, must be the main recipients of the service provided. It was also crucially important to invest in the formal and informal education of young persons, including their sexual education.

65. The work being carried out for the advancement of women by non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies had generated change by bringing gender discrimination to public attention. All persons everywhere should have the same development opportunities. In that connection, the MERCOSUR countries welcomed and supported the recommendations formulated by the Secretary-General in documents A/60/165 and A/60/137.

66. **Mr. Chernenko** (Russian Federation) said that despite the evident progress made towards the achievement of gender equality, the international community still had to address a whole range of outstanding problems, *inter alia*: the feminization of poverty; the lack of effective operational mechanisms to achieve gender equality; the removal of gaps in legislation ensuring non-discrimination on the basis of gender; and the elimination of various forms of violence against women.

67. His Government fully shared the belief that gender equality was necessary to achieve sustainable social development and establish conditions for the full realization of human potential. To that end, the Russian Federation had put forward its candidature for re-election to the Commission on the Status of Women. Through its continued participation in the work of the Commission, the Russian Federation intended to promote a constructive dialogue among all interested countries and also take a balanced account of the interests of all regional States.

68. The Russian Federation attached considerable importance to dialogue with the international community on gender equality issues, as demonstrated by the visit to his country in 2004 by Ms. Ertürk, the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women, its causes and consequences.

69. The Russian Federation was continuing to increase its international commitments to ensure gender equality and had become a full party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

70. The gender factor had acquired particular importance during the current implementation of major national reforms in the areas of social policy, administrative and governmental apparatus, and financial and budgetary relations. One of the steps taken in the course of those reforms had been the establishment of a governmental commission to promote equality between men and women.

71. **Mr. Hannesson** (Iceland) said that Iceland remained fully committed to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. All countries had a duty to continue their efforts towards implementing those commitments.

72. Iceland attached great importance to gender equality at the national and international levels. His country had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, and he urged States that had not yet done so to do the same. However, he expressed concern about the scope of the reservations that countries had made to the Convention. Such reservations were contrary to the objectives of the Convention and should be withdrawn.

73. His delegation welcomed the political declaration adopted at the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and looked forward to the fiftieth anniversary of the Commission, which would provide an important opportunity to reflect on its achievements. It also supported the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which was an important instrument for the advancement of women and would require a fundamental change in procedure, delivery, attitudes and habits.

74. While progress had been made towards gender equality and the rights of women in the decade since the Beijing Conference, much more was still required. He therefore reiterated the issues of particular concern for his delegation, namely, violence against women, trafficking in women and girls, restrictions on the freedom of movement of women, women's lack of participation in political life, unequal pay and reproductive rights.

75. **Ms. Chenoweth** (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) said that the work of FAO on gender equality was much more visible in Millennium Development Goal 1 than Goal 3 despite its active efforts to promote measures to

strengthen gender equality through access to food, natural resources, decision-making processes and employment opportunities.

76. For those truly interested in tackling gender inequality, poverty and food security, it was perhaps most important to address the unequal laws and practices related to land, property and inheritance rights. Globally, women owned very little agricultural land compared to men, despite their important contribution to agricultural production, and existing user rights did not give women the necessary decision-making control over land or allow them to invest and develop production. Overcoming such laws and practices would remove the basis of profound gender discrimination and greatly contribute to the alleviation of poverty and hunger.

77. Despite the important advances made in the decade since the Beijing Conference, gender issues had not been mainstreamed as much as they could have been. Little had changed in the rural areas of many developing countries and some gains had been lost owing to chronic poverty, poor governance, civil conflict and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Reality showed that without a determined effort and a strong political will, gender issues were simply not taken into consideration in policies, programmes and projects at the local, national and international levels. A systemic and holistic approach was therefore needed.

78. **Mr. Ndjoukou** (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that ILO identified gender as an issue with a cross-cutting impact on all its programmes and activities. It also had a long-standing record of working to combat all forms of violence against women. The approach taken by ILO focused on: respect for international labour standards; the fine-tuning of national policies to prevent violence against women and combat trafficking in women; sustainable poverty reduction through improved access to decent work; and the elaboration and implementation of policies in the workplace to prevent employee assaults and discrimination in all its forms.

79. The report by ILO entitled "A Global Alliance against Forced Labour" had concluded that forced economic exploitation was evenly divided between both sexes in such sectors as agriculture, construction and brick-making but that forced sexual exploitation entrapped almost entirely women and girls. It had also identified poverty, gender and ethnicity as the key

determinants of human trafficking. On a positive note, however, the report had argued that forced labour could be abolished if Governments and national institutions pursued active policies and vigorous enforcement measures.

80. The gender, poverty and employment programme of ILO argued that poverty could be traced to certain types and patterns of work as well as to exclusion from rights to and opportunities for decent work. ILO implemented a variety of programmes to improve the lives of women and girls in rural areas which focused on, *inter alia*: promoting the rights of women working in the agricultural sector; creating jobs and opportunities for entrepreneurship; providing training; and strengthening institutional capacity to deliver financial services to women. ILO also facilitated the implementation strategy by helping local, national and regional stakeholders to understand the linkages between gender, poverty and work; develop, implement and assess anti-poverty and employment policies and programmes; and integrate a gender and employment perspective into national and international agendas for poverty eradication.

81. As a member of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, ILO had contributed to the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action, particularly in the identification and implementation of gender-sensitive employment and poverty eradication policies at national and international forums.

82. **Ms. von Lilien-Waldau** (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)) said that the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/60/165 rightly highlighted how improving the economic status of women could lead to a dramatic acceleration of rural development and the reduction of rural poverty. The report had also recommended that the topic should be afforded explicit attention in the context of the World Summit on the Information Society. For that reason, IFAD, together with the Government of Japan, had organized a side event during the Summit focusing on the economic empowerment of rural women.

83. The issue of rural women's economic empowerment had become increasingly central to the Fund's mission to enable the rural poor to overcome poverty. Rural poverty could not be overcome without leadership by women, full economic opportunities for women and an extended role for them in decision-

making. Advancements in women's economic positions improved their social status, brought benefits to their families and enhanced their role in community affairs. IFAD prioritized the economic empowerment of women as the primary means to improve their overall status and thus contribute to broad-based economic growth, poverty reduction and food security. Once women had secured access to resources and were able to take advantage of economic opportunities they would have the capacity to become powerful agents of change. To that end, microfinance initiatives for women featured heavily in the Fund's portfolio as a means of increasing women's independent income-earning capacity.

84. The limitation of women's access to productive resources was attributable not only to legislation and constitutional rights but also to social perceptions of gender roles. Women's ownership and control of productive assets must therefore be seen both as a right and as an economic necessity.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.